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AUTHOR Monroe, Marian
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ABSTRACT

Stress in relationship to preschool children, day care environments, and the parents of children in day care is examined in this conference paper. Some events that may cause stress in individuals and the defense mechanisms associated with stressful experiences are indicated. Guidelines are provided for identifying children under stress and for examining day care environments for stressful conditions. Additionally, aspects of the caregiver's role in minimizing stress in children are listed. Clues indicating stress on parents are identified, and a list of parents' needs is provided. Stress affecting caregivers, providers, and decision-makers in day care settings is discussed, and advice for coping with stressful situations is offered. Throughout the discussion, reference is made to the book "Day Care, Families and Stress" and to five associated training modules developed by the Texas Department of Human Resources. (Author/RH)

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FAMILIES, DAY CARE, AND STRESS

Marian Monroe
Child Development Director
Community Resources Division
Texas Department of Human Resources
P.O. Box 2960
Austin, Texas 78769

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FAMILIES, DAY CARE & STRESS

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FAMILIES, DAY CARE, AND STRESS

Marian Monroe

Introduction

The Texas Department of Human Resources has grown steadily aware of its need to know more about the stress that affects children, their families, and everyone who provides day care. This brought about the development of a book, Day Care, Families and Stress, and five training modules. These were developed by bringing together a task force composed of persons with over 200 years experience working with children and families. This included work related to handicapped children, protective, mental health practice, teacher training programs, university teaching, writing, home and family life education, home economics extension, day care and parenting.

The training modules were used to train approximately 80 facilitators to present workshops across Texas. The training was a cooperative project between Texas Department of Human Resources and Texas Department of Community Affairs. Del Mar and Tarrant County Junior Colleges (Corpus Christi and Fort Worth) did the facilitator training.

Stress

At some time each of you has had that keyed up feeling that puts your thoughts, bodies and emotions off course. Stress comes into people's

lives in all degrees from minor to serious. It is caused by happy as well as distressing and unhappy events.

To get a feeling for this idea complete the following "Stress Test".

1. Check any event list that has happened to you in the past 12 months.
2. Give yourself the score indicated.
3. Total up your score.

There are no right or wrong answers. This test just reflects what has happened to you and is your private measure.

Stress Test[1]

Event	Value	Your Score
Death of spouse	100	____
Divorce	73	____
Marital Separation	65	____
Jail term	63	____
Death of close family member	63	____
Personal injury or illness	53	____
Marriage	50	____
Fired from work	47	____
Marital reconciliation	45	____
Retirement	45	____
Change in family member's health	44	____
Pregnancy	40	____
Sex difficulties	39	____
Addition to family	39	____
Business readjustment	39	____
Change in financial status	38	____
Death of close friend	37	____
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Spouse begins or stops work	26	____
Starting or finishing school	26	____
Change in living conditions	25	____
Revision of personal habits	24	____

2

Trouble with boss	23	____
Change in work hours, conditions	20	____
Change in residence	20	____
Change in schools	20	____
Change in recreational habits	19	____
Change in church activities	19	____
Change in social activities	18	____
Mortgage or loan under $10,000	17	____
Change in sleeping habits	16	____
Change in number of family gatherings	15	____
Change in eating habits	15	____
Vacation	13	____
Christmas season	12	____
Minor violation of the law	11	____
TOTAL		____

The total score on the "Stress Test" measures the amount of stress you have experienced in one-year. It can be used to predict the chances of your suffering serious illness within next two years as follows:

-Less than 150 = 37% chance

-150 to 300 = 50-50 chance

-Over 300 = 80% chance

High scores do not guarantee illness. These are simply indications of amount of stressful experiences in a given amount of time. If your score is high that is a good sign that you may need to take good care of yourself.

Those who've studied stress observe that:

-Some forms of stress are common to all, some are peculiar to certain cultures or socioeconomic groups, and some are unique to certain people.

-Each of use perceives and deals with stress differently, depending

1 Smolensky, Jack. A Guide to Child Growth and Development. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1977.

on our personalities, environments, and backgrounds.

-Mild stress can result in improved performance, but intense stress or long periods of mild stress can result in poor performance.

-Long-term stress generally causes frustration, confusion, and despair--even illness.

-Some stress, however, is necessary to our well-being.

People begin to deal with stress at an early age. Children model their problem-solving skills on the behavior of the adults around them. Through imitation the child lays the groundwork for handling stressful situations throughout his life. The role of day care providers therefore is important to a child's learning to deal successfully with stress.

It is hoped that a sense of partnership will be fostered between families (children and parents) and day care providers (care givers and decision makers) by presenting a realistic look at the stress that care givers and families experience. Each person brings his own values, attitudes, and beliefs to this partnership.

Handling Stress

How we handle stress depends on our behavior patterns and how we perceive the immediate stress. Most of us have not only healthy but also some unhealthy patterns of stress management. Frequently we rely on defense mechanisms. Defense mechanisms are not all bad. Sometimes they are the only way we can cope with the situation in which we find ourselves.

Lets look at some of them:

Defense Mechanisms

Daydreaming: Mind wanders freely from one thing to another to escape from unpleasant situations.

Rationalization: Make up "good" reasons to justify one's behavior.

Regression: Return to an earlier form of behavior (like that in childhood) Temporary state.

Fixation: Develop one's personality to a certain point and then stop or "fix" one's personality development there.

Displacement: One has a problem or some type of frustration and cannot find any solution; transfers frustration to someone or something else.

Projection: Blame someone else for one's own mistakes or shortcomings. Denial of reality. Disown certain behaviors or characteristics.

Scapegoating: Blame someone or a group for an unfavorable situation.

Suppression: Consciously control one's behavior by holding back one's feeling.

Identification: Associate one's own identity with that of another person who greatly admired.

Compensation: Circumstances or disabilities prevent one from doing something one wants to do so one substitutes some other activity or idea.

Reaction Formation: Doing the opposite of what one really feels like doing. Doing it to an extreme.

The training modules include a "Stress Game" for use by 4 to 8 people that is rather fun and something you could adapt as a discussion tool in a training or sharing situation. It is a deck of cards composed of:

1. Items with scores from "Stress Test"
2. Coping cards - Defense Mechanisms
3. Instructions - Shuffle the deck which includes stress situation cards and coping mechanism cards. For each hand a player should lay down

one card. To win the hand a player must lay down the lowest stress card or a coping card. The first player to lay down a coping card automatically wins the hand providing the player is able to give an example of how the coping card would be used to deal with the stress situations laid down by the other players. The player who wins the most hands wins the game.

Stress and Day Care

Now to move from the general concept of stress and coping to the specifics related to day care.

First, there is the child's stress. This is probably what you feel is most familiar. It's negative effects are identified through looking at the following four questions:

1. Is the child's growth and behavior appropriate for him? The answer involves understanding the individual child.
2. Does the child's growth and behavior match those of most of the other children his age? This helps you know when to become concerned.
3. Has there been a major change in the child's behavior?
4. Does the child's behavior fit the circumstance?

Many of the children in care have experienced stressful situations at home, at school and in day care settings. They have little experience with understanding themselves or the adults around them. To do so, they need your help and guidance.

All children benefit from a well-rounded day care program in which (1) children are respected as individuals, (2) activities and equipment

are appropriate for their care and development, and (3) positive relationships are built with adults and other children. When distressed children are served, you can expect extremes in the behavior patterns and needs. However, a well-planned basic program can support a variety of children.

It is important to realize that the day care program itself can create stress in the lives of children. To be sure your program minimizes stress, ask yourself the following questions from time to time:

-Does the program offer an atmosphere for building trust?

-Is each child treated in a warm, respectful, and dependable manner?

-Are the good qualities of each child reinforced so that he is better able to develop a positive self-image?

-Do the children have the opportunity and freedom to explore and express themselves?

-Is the routine organized so that the children have ample food, rest, exercise, and activities suited to their needs?

-Are limitations set and enforced so that children know what they can and can't do?

-Is the time spent with the children satisfying?

Minimizing Stress in the Day Care Settings

The interaction, scheduling, equipment, and room arrangement in a day care setting can work together to minimize or eliminate stress. Beginning on page 24 of the book, Day Care, Families and Stress, are numerous

examples of how these can work together throughout the day.

For example, the caregiver's roles in minimizing stress for children include:

1. Supporting the family
   - -Show concern
   - -Be alert to parents' needs
   - -Be a model for adult-child interaction (giving directions, handling problems, recognizing achievement, etc.)
   - -Make home visits
   - -Avoid judgments
   - -Have conferences
2. Communicating
   - -Plan for consistency with other caregivers
   - -Greet each child (when he arrives or you join the group)
   - -Tell each child goodby (when he leaves or you leave)
   - -Relay parent's instructions to other caregivers
   - -Relay the needs of the child to other caregivers

   (For example, before you leave be sure your replacement knows Susie's ribbon is in her shoe).
3. Considering the needs of individual's as well as those of the group
   - -Identify the child's family (know who the child talks about).
   - -Use learning centers.
   - -Keep groups small.
   - -Help the child gain control.

-Plan the equipment and room arrangement.

-Use flexible schedules.

-Use an ounce of prevention.

-Recognize success (attention for desirable actions).

4. Setting and enforcing limits

-Make limits reasonable (I will not let you hurt other people).

-Be consistent.

-Give choices when appropriate.

-Give positive directions.

-Show disapproval of the act rather than the child.

-Use a natural voice and keep the message simple.

-Watch body language (eye contact is important).

5. Assessing the needs of the children

-Take notes (tape recorders are helpful). Be factual.

-Pinpoint specific times when a given child's behavior is disruptive.

-Be alert to patterns of skill development.

-Have professional conferences.

6. Organizing the physical environment

-Provide uncluttered traffic lanes. Lanes should go around not through activities.

-Save energy by keeping things near where they are used.

-Improvise with what is on hand or using inexpensive material.

-Control the noise level.

-Be prepared (gather activity materials before you start, - this includes clean up materials).

Parent Stress

An important part of dealing with the stress in day care is recognizing and dealing with parents stress. To do so we have to acknowledge that because of individual differences in patterns and perceptions, a given problem may be impossible for one person to resolve, but easy for another. Our ability to resolve stress also depends on the resources available to us. For example, a young mother who is deserted by her husband may not be able to find employment until she gets job training.

Some parents are not able to give their children the care they need. Before acting, remember you should be as sensitive to the needs of the parents as you are to their children's needs. Your feelings about the parents should be explored carefully, as they may hold the key to helping a child and his family grow in a positive direction.

You are better able to offer support to families if you can recognize their stress. A variety of clues indicate parental stress:

-Disorganized behavior (Forget vital things. Tend to run late. Confusion).

-Signs of frustration (Worried expression. Lack of confidence. Scolding for slowness).

-Inability to accept help (Guilt because they can't cope. Walk away when you talk about their child).

-Concerned more about themselves than their child.

Parents who demonstrate one or more of these (above) characteristics,

may be temporarily unable to carry out their normal functions and are likely to need help. Now to look at some parent needs (page 4 of handout).

Parents Needs

They need help to feel good about themselves.

They need to be comforted and supported when distressed.

They need to be liked for their likable qualities.

They need someone they can trust and lean on.

They need someone who will not be tricked into accepting their low sense of self-worth.

They need someone who will keep on trying to help them find and experience pleasure.

They need someone who can help them meet their practical needs.

They need someone who understands their difficulty in having dependents, if they themselves have never been able to be dependent.

Day care providers are in a good position to help children and families who experience short term, mild, or normal stress situations. However, working with a family experiencing extreme long-term stress will require a call for help.

Over a long period of time, you may see some progress in the family's situation, but it probably won't be enough for the child or parents.

They may need help from other agnecies,.such as the Department of Human Resources or Mental Health Mental Retardation, and from groups such as Parents Anonymous.

Caregivers and Providers Stress

Caregivers or providers experience stress, too. Just as we are sensitive to other people, children, parents and other staff are aware of our feelings. Oddly enough, sometimes we have more trouble recognizing our own stress than that of someone else. Providers have to deal with personal stress, such as disagreements with teenage children, as well as those related to day care.

All day care personnel face many stressful situations. Your relationships with other staff members and the children in care can be sources of stress. Are you worried about keeping your job? How do you feel about other staff members and the director? Is everyone comfortable working together? Is there mutual respect for one another's skills and feelings? Is there a cooperative spirit among staff? What happens when a child's behavior is totally out-of-bounds?

To deal with these you need to recognize where you are personally.

1. Take care of your body.
   -Eat a well-balanced diet.
   -Drink plenty of healthy fluids.
   -Rest during the day.
   ·Take advantage of the ebb and flow of activities.

·Sit down when the routine allows (at sandbox, reading, etc.)

-Exercise.

·Whenever you feel tense, - relax, breath deeply, evenly and gently. Let whole body sink into relaxation.

·Tense your muscles and relax them for equal periods of time.

·Roll your shoulders gently and rythmically (alternate using rowing motion).

·Prop up your legs, flex your knees, then rotate your feet.

·Participate in some vigorous activities with the children such as dancing, marching and jumping.

·Walk rapidly around the yard occasionally.

·Wear comfortable clothing (take an extra pair of shoes).

·Relax at break time.

2. Take a mental health leave (especially if you have personal problems or a difficult day care problem).

·Vacation.

·Temporarily decline adding a child needing special help.

·Move a child to another caregiver.

·Shift your work schedule.

·Get relief from other staff (break time - leave at naptime).

3. Seek help when its needed.

-Support from staff (Ask aide, cook or housekeeper to volunteer to eat with a difficult child. Double up so there can be 10 minute breaks).

-Get help from director (if caregiver).

·Conferences.

·Volunteers.

·Meetings.

·Equipment.

-Use volunteers.

-Enlist help from parents.

4. Look at yourself as a provider (See form on p. 64-65 of Day Care, Families, and Stress).

-Ask yourself, do I:

·Belong in day care?

·Understand children?

·Provide what children need?

·Want to be a better caregiver?

·Support parents?

-Be ready to invest time and energy to improve.

-Decide if you need to "Call it quits".

Should you quit:

Working with children?

Working with an individual child?

Working for a specific site or employee?

-Factors that influence your decision are:

·Personal feelings.

·Your health.

·Assistance available to you.

·Physical setting.

·Needs of parents.

·Your skills.

·Make up of the child care group you are working with.

·Needs of a child.

Decision Makers and Stress

A decision-maker can alleviate stress for children, parents, and care-givers. If you are a decision-maker (owner, director, etc.) you need to carefully determine:

- Who you serve (Age, handicaps, income level, etc.)
- Management responsibilities
- Responsibilities of staff
- Support to families

Pages 71-88 and the appendices of Day Care, Families, and Stress contains information on resource groups, home visiting, abused and neglected children, abusive parents, printed materials on stress (Adult reading and children's books) and Audiovisuals. These can help you manage your role.

Summary

Stress is both positive and negative. To some people, stress is the spice of life. To other it is distressful and unsettling. Often the critical difference stems from the kind of adaptations the individuals make to life and its daily stress.

Dealing with stress means:

-Responding to it. The amount and degree of anxiety experienced will depend upon the situation.

-Pin-pointing its cause and its effect on all concerned.

-Developing solutions for resolving it.

-Selecting the best solution to relieve it.

-Carrying out the chosen solution. It may be necessary to select another solution if the first is not effective.

-Mastering the stress in a reasonable way, which involves taking into account the needs of all concerned.

APPENDIX

FAMILIES, DAY CARE AND STRESS

Handout for
Families, Day Care and Stress Workshop
NAEYC
San Francisco, California
November, 1980

Taken From:

INSTRUCTIONAL MODULES FOR
TRAINING STAFF OF DAY CARE CENTERS

Linda Gifford, Director
Dennis Flinn, Media Specialist
Paula Sommerville, Research Assistant

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Developed for the
Child Development Program Division
Texas Department of Human Resources

Project Manager
Marian B. Monroe

Stress Test

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Vacation	13	____
Christmas season	12	____
Minor violation of the law	11	____
Total		____

Smolensky, Jack. A Guide to Child Growth and Development, Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1977.

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Displacement: One has a problem or some type of frustration and can not find any solution; transfers frustration to someone or something else.

Projection: Blame someone else for one's own mistakes or shortcomings. Denial of reality. Disown certain behaviors or characteristics.

Scapegoating: Blame someone or a group for an unfavorable situation. Find and place cause or blame elsewhere.

Suppression: Consciously control one's behavior by holding back one's feelings.

Repression: Push back or bury in your subconscious unacceptable thoughts or feelings.

Identification: Associate one's own identity with that of another person who greatly admired.

Compensation: Circumstances or disabilities prevent one from doing something one wants to do so one substitutes some other activity or idea.

Reaction Formation: Doing the opposite of what one really feels like doing. Doing it to an extreme.

Parents Needs	How Center Meets Needs
They need help to feel good about themselves.	
They need to be comforted and supported when needed.	
They need to be liked for their likable qualities.	
They need someone they can trust and lean on.	
They need someone who will not be tricked into accepting their low sense of self-worth.	
They need someone who will keep on trying to help them find and experience pleasure.	
They need someone who can help them meet their practical needs.	
They need someone who understands their difficulty in having dependents when they themselves have never been able to be dependent.	
They need someone who will not criticize them.	
They need someone who will help them understand their children and their needs.	
They need someone who can give to them without making them feel inadequate for their need to be given to.	
They need someone who does not need to use them in any way.	
They need to feel valuable.	
Eventually, they need to be able to help themselves and to have some role in helping others.	

Adapted from:

Child Abuse and Neglect: The Problem and Its Management, Volume 2. U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Office of Human Development/ Office of Child Development. Children's Bureau/National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect.